“The Jersey Devil, the Leeds Family, Caleb Pusey, and Benjamin Franklin”
By: Carla Welsh (née Seitz)
July 23, 2026

You may have heard the legend of the Jersey Devil, often traced back to a woman known as “Mother Leeds.” It is thought “Mother Leeds” was Deborah (née Smith) Leeds (1685–1748), wife of Japhet Leeds. They were Quakers. Their daughter, Hannah, married into the author’s Steelman family, on a distant cousin line.

According to the story, in 1735 “Mother Leeds” was giving birth to her 13th child in the Pine Barrens. It was a difficult labor, and overcome with exhaustion, she cursed the baby. The child was then said to have emerged with wings, hooves, and a tail, and to prey on animals.

For a time, fear of this creature spread widely, with newspapers frequently publishing reported sightings. With that said, stories like this usually have roots somewhere. So where did this one come from?

The Jersey Devil legend appears to trace back to Daniel Leeds (1651–1720), an almanac publisher in the Pinelands. Leeds published *The Temple of Wisdom* (1688) and *News of a Trumpet Sounding in the Wilderness* (1697), works filled with astrology and other mystical subjects that many Quakers considered objectionable. Among his most outspoken critics was Caleb Pusey, of Upland,

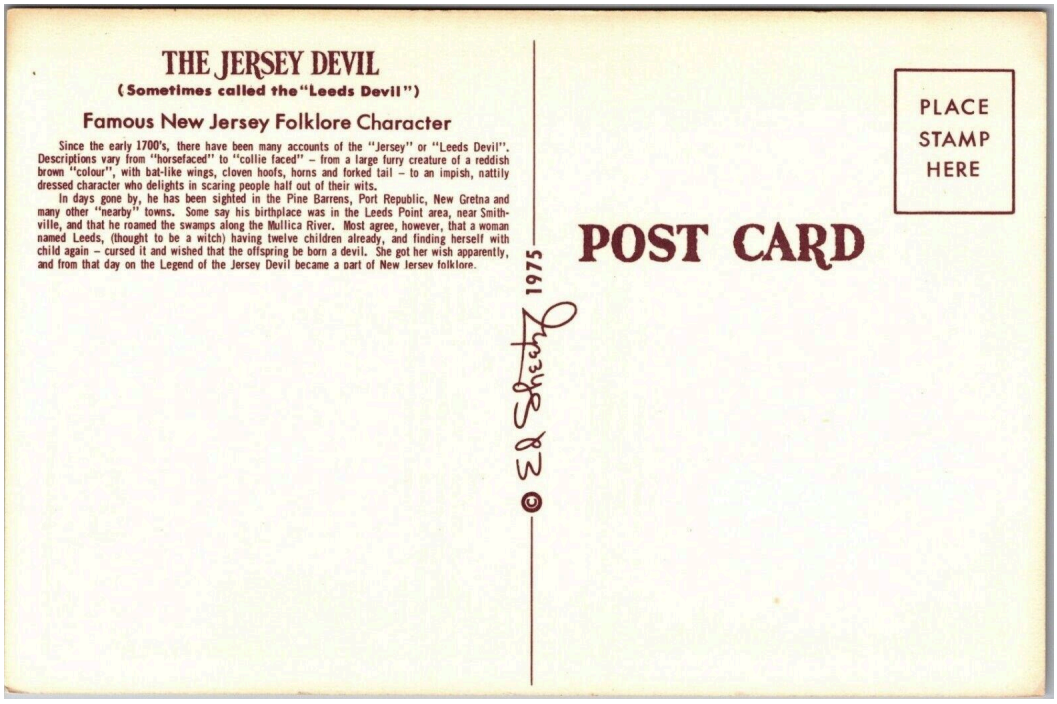
Pennsylvania, one of William Penn's closest associates, who answered Leeds in *Satan's Harbinger Encountered* (1700), *Daniel Leeds, Justly Rebuked for Abusing William Penn* (1702), and *Some Brief Observations Made on Daniel Leeds His Book, Entituled the Second Part of the Mystery of Fox-craft* (1705/1706). Their lengthy pamphlet war helped shape Leeds's reputation.

Leeds eventually left the Quakers, converted to Anglicanism, and became one of their fiercest critics. His association with Edward Hyde, 3rd Earl of Clarendon, the unpopular British royal governor of New Jersey, further damaged his reputation, and he was increasingly portrayed as being tied to dark or "devilish" forces.

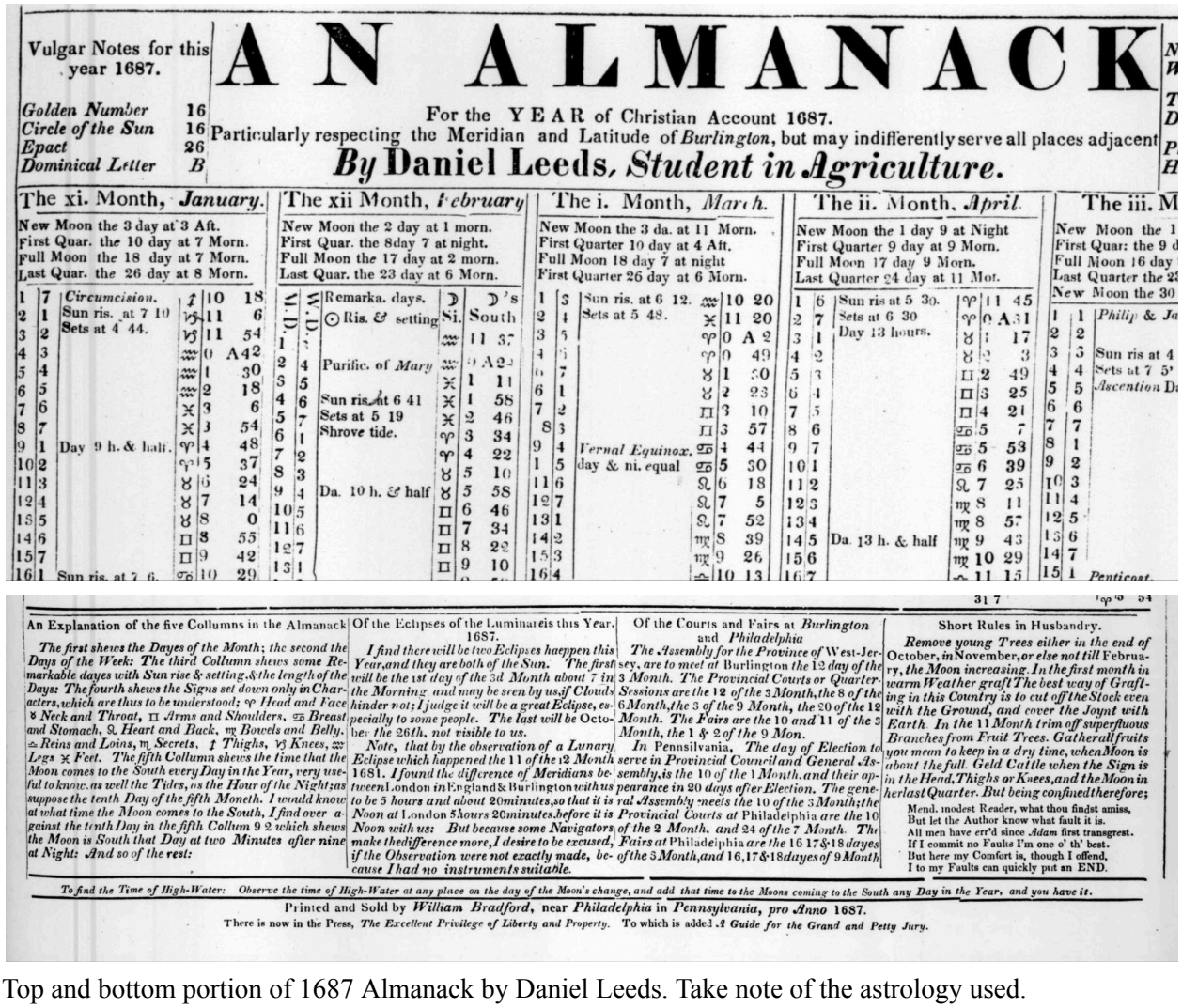
After the death of Daniel Leeds, his son Titan Leeds continued the almanac business and, in 1728, began printing the family crest, which featured a wyvern resembling later images of the Jersey Devil.

Soon after, the Leeds Almanack competed with Poor Richard's Almanack by Benjamin Franklin. Franklin fueled interest to boost sales with a rivalry, predicting Titan Leeds's death and joking that he was already a ghost, reinforcing the eerie reputation surrounding the Leeds name. In 1735, Franklin wrote:

> *"...But having receiv'd much Abuse from Titan Leeds deceas'd, (Titan Leeds when living would not have us'd me so!) I say, having receiv'd much Abuse from the Ghost of Titan Leeds, who pretends to be still living, and to write Almanacks in spight of me and my Predictions, I cannot help saying, that tho' I take it patiently, I take it very unkindly."*



Back of postcard: *THE JERSEY DEVIL (Sometimes called the Leeds Devil). Famous New Jersey Folklore Character* (1975).



Vulgar Notes for this year 1687.

Golden Number 16
Circle of the Sun 16
Epact 26
Dominical Letter B

A N A L M A N A C K

For the YEAR of Christian Account 1687.
Particularly respecting the Meridian and Latitude of *Burlington*, but may indifferently serve all places adjacent

By Daniel Leeds, *Student in Agriculture.*

The xi. Month, *January.*

New Moon the 3 day at 3 Aft.
First Quar. the 10 day at 7 Morn.
Full Moon the 18 day at 7 Morn.
Last Quar. the 26 day at 8 Morn.

1	7	*Circumcision.*	♐	10	18
2	1	Sun ris. at 7 10	♑	11	6
3	2	Sets at 4 44.	♑	11	54
4	3		♒	0	A42
5	4		♒	1	30
6	5		♒	2	18
7	6		♓	3	6
8	7		♓	3	54
9	1	Day 9 h. & half.	♈	4	48
10	2		♈	5	37
11	3		♉	6	24
12	4		♉	7	14
13	5		♉	8	0
14	6		♊	8	55
15	7		♊	9	42
16	1	Sun ris. at 7 6.	♋	10	29

The xii Month, *February*

New Moon the 2 day at 1 morn.
First Quar. the 8day 7 at night.
Full Moon the 17 day at 2 morn.
Last Quar. the 23 day at 6 Morn.

1	3				
2	4	Purific. of *Mary*	♒	0	A22
3	5		♓	1	11
4	6	Sun ris. at 6 41	♓	1	58
5	7	Sets at 5 19	♓	2	46
6	1	Shrove tide.	♈	3	34
7	2		♈	4	22
8	3		♉	5	10
9	4	Da. 10 h. & half	♉	5	58
10	5		♊	6	46
11	6		♊	7	34
12	7		♊	8	22
13	1		♋	9	10

Remarka. days. ☽ ☽'s
☉ Ris. & setting Si. South

The i. Month, *March.*

New Moon the 3 da. at 11 Morn.
First Quarter 10 day at 4 Aft.
Full Moon 18 day 7 at night
First Quarter 26 day at 6 Morn.

1	3	Sun ris. at 6 12.	♒	10	20
2	4	Sets at 5 48.	♓	11	20
3	5		♈	0	A 2
4	6		♈	0	49
5	7		♉	1	30
6	1		♉	2	23
7	2		♊	3	10
8	3		♊	3	57
9	4	*Vernal Equinox.*	♋	4	44
1	5	day & ni. equal	♋	5	30
11	6		♌	6	18
12	7		♌	7	5
13	1		♌	7	52
14	2		♍	8	39
15	3		♍	9	26
16	4		♎	10	13

The ii. Month, *April.*

New Moon the 1 day 9 at Night
First Quarter 9 day at 9 Morn.
Full Moon 17 day 9 Morn.
Last Quarter 24 day at 11 Mor.

1	6	Sun ris at 5 30.	♈	11	45
2	7	Sets at 6 30	♈	0	A31
3	1	Day 13 hours.	♉	1	17
4	2		♉	2	3
5	3		♊	2	49
6	4		♊	3	25
7	5		♊	4	21
8	6		♋	5	7
9	7		♋	5	53
10	1		♋	6	39
11	2		♌	7	25
12	3		♍	8	11
13	4		♍	8	57
14	5	Da. 13 h. & half	♍	9	43
15	6		♍	10	29
16	7		♎	11	15

The iii. M

New Moon the 1
First Quar: the 9 d
Full Moon 16 day
Last Quarter the 2
New Moon the 30

1	1	*Philip & Ja*
2	2	
3	3	Sun ris at 4
4	4	Sets at 7 5'
5	5	*Ascention D*
6	6	
7	7	
8	1	
9	2	
10	3	
11	4	
12	5	
13	6	
14	7	
15	1	*Penticost.*

An Explanation of the five Collumns in the Almanack

The first shews the Dayes of the Month; the second the Days of the Week: The third Collumn shews some Remarkable dayes with Sun rise & setting, & the length of the Days: The fourth shews the Signs set down only in Characters, which are thus to be understood; ♈ *Head and Face* ♉ *Neck and Throat,* ♊ *Arms and Shoulders,* ♋ *Breast and Stomach,* ♌ *Heart and Back,* ♍ *Bowels and Belly.* ♎ *Reins and Loins,* ♏ *Secrets,* ♐ *Thighs,* ♑ *Knees,* ♒ *Legs* ♓ *Feet. The fifth Collumn shews the time that the Moon comes to the South every Day in the Year, very useful to know, as well the Tides, as the Hour of the Night; as suppose the tenth Day of the fifth Moneth. I would know at what time the Moon comes to the South, I find over against the tenth Day in the fifth Collum 9 2 which shews the Moon is South that Day at two Minutes after nine at Night: And so of the rest:*

Of the Eclipses of the Luminareis this Year. 1687.

I find there will be two Eclipses happen this Year, and they are both of the Sun. The first will be the 1st day of the 3d Month about 7 in the Morning, and may be seen by us, if Clouds hinder not; I judge it will be a great Eclipse, especially to some people. The last will be October *the 26th. not visible to us.*

Note, that by the observation of a Lunary Eclipse which happened the 11 of the 12 Month 1681. I found the difference of Meridians between London *in* England *&* Burlington *with us to be 5 hours and about 20minutes, so that it is Noon at* London *5hours 20minutes before it is Noon with us: But because some Navigators make the difference more, I desire to be excused, if the Observation were not exactly made, because I had no instruments suitable.*

Of the Courts and Fairs at *Burlington* and *Philadelphia*

The Assembly for the Province of West-Jersey, *are to meet at* Burlington *the 12 day of the 3 Month. The Provincial Courts or Quarter-Sessions are the 12 of the 3 Month, the 8 of the 6 Month, the 3 of the 9 Month, the 20 of the 12 Month. The Fairs are the 10 and 11 of the 3 Month, the 1 & 2 of the 9 Mon.*

In Pennsilvania, *The day of Election to serve in Provincial Council and General Assembly, is the 10 of the 1 Month. and their appearance in 20 days after Election. The general Assembly meets the 10 of the 3 Month; the Provincial Courts at* Philadelphia *are the 10 of the 2 Month. and 24 of the 7 Month. The Fairs at* Philadelphia *are the 16 17 & 18 dayes of the 3 Month, and 16, 17 & 18 dayes of 9 Month*

Short Rules in Husbandry.

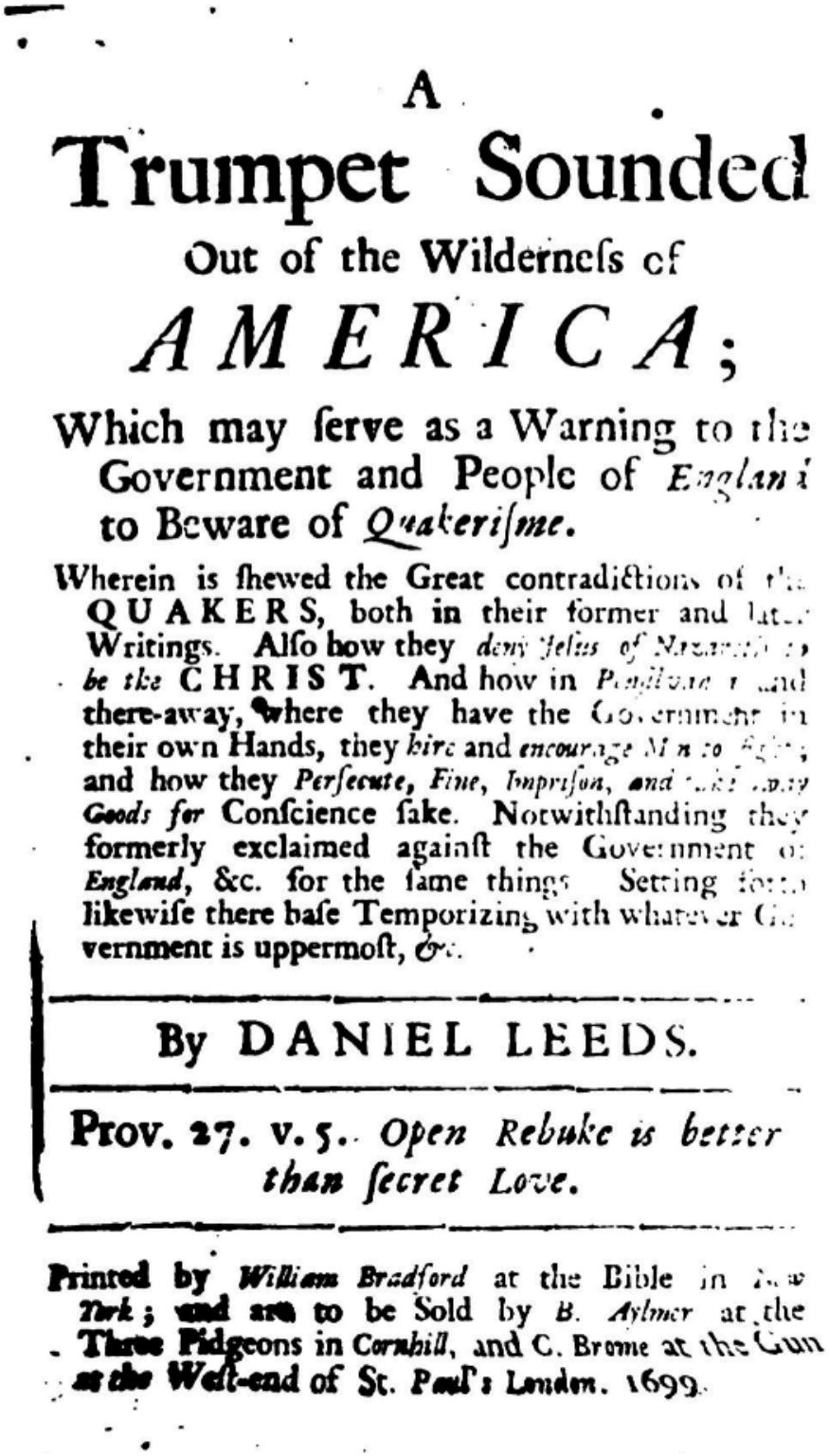
Remove young Trees either in the end of October, *in* November, *or else not till* February, *the Moon increasing. In the first month in warm Weather graft The best way of Grafting in this Country is to cut off the Stock even with the Ground, and cover the Joynt with Earth. In the 11 Month trim off superfluous Branches from Fruit Trees. Gather all fruits you mean to keep in a dry time, when Moon is about the full. Geld Cattle when the Sign is in the Head, Thighs or Knees, and the Moon in her last Quarter. But being confined therefore;*

Mend, modest Reader, what thou findst amiss,
But let the Author know what fault it is.
All men have err'd since *Adam* first transgrest.
If I commit no Faults I'm one o' th' best.
But here my Comfort is, though I offend,
I to my Faults can quickly put an END.

To find the Time of High-Water: Observe the time of High-Water at any place on the day of the Moon's change, and add that time to the Moons coming to the South any Day in the Year, and you have it.

Printed and Sold by *William Bradford*, near *Philadelphia* in *Pennsylvania*, *pro Anno* 1687.
There is now in the Press, *The Excellent Privilege of Liberty and Property.* To which is added *A Guide for the Grand and Petty Jury.*

Top and bottom portion of 1687 Almanack by Daniel Leeds. Take note of the astrology used.



A

Trumpet Sounded

Out of the Wilderneſs of

AMERICA;

Which may ſerve as a Warning to the Government and People of *England* to Beware of *Quakeriſme.*

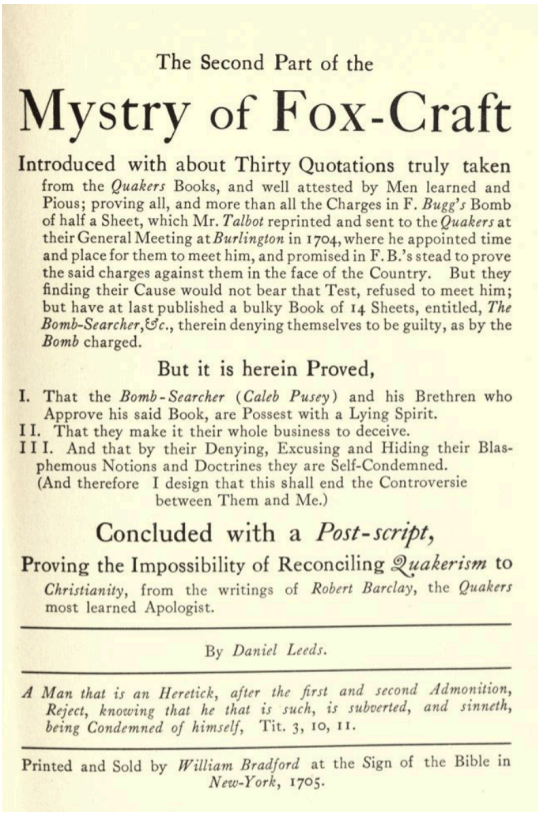
Wherein is ſhewed the Great contradictions of the QUAKERS, both in their former and latter Writings. Alſo how they *deny Jeſus of Nazareth to be the* CHRIST. And how in *Pendsylvania* and there-away, where they have the Government in their own Hands, they *hire* and *encourage Men to fight*; and how they *Perſecute, Fine, Impriſon, and take away Goods for* Conſcience ſake. Notwithſtanding they formerly exclaimed againſt the Government of *England*, &c. for the ſame things. Setting forth likewiſe there baſe Temporizing with whatever Government is uppermoſt, *&c.*

By DANIEL LEEDS.

Prov. 27. v. 5. *Open Rebuke is better than ſecret Love.*

Printed by *William Bradford* at the Bible in *New York*; and are to be Sold by *B. Aylmer* at the Three Pidgeons in *Cornhill*, and C. Brome at the Gun at the Weſt-end of St. Paul's London. 1699.

Daniel Leeds, *A Trumpet Sounded Out of the Wilderness of America* (1699). Leeds writes a warning to "Beware of Quakerism."



The Second Part of the

Mystry of Fox-Craft

Introduced with about Thirty Quotations truly taken from the *Quakers* Books, and well attested by Men learned and Pious; proving all, and more than all the Charges in F. *Bugg's* Bomb of half a Sheet, which Mr. *Talbot* reprinted and sent to the *Quakers* at their General Meeting at *Burlington* in 1704, where he appointed time and place for them to meet him, and promised in F. B.'s stead to prove the said charges against them in the face of the Country. But they finding their Cause would not bear that Test, refused to meet him; but have at last published a bulky Book of 14 Sheets, entitled, *The Bomb-Searcher, &c.*, therein denying themselves to be guilty, as by the *Bomb* charged.

But it is herein Proved,

I. That the *Bomb-Searcher* (*Caleb Pusey*) and his Brethren who Approve his said Book, are Possest with a Lying Spirit.
II. That they make it their whole business to deceive.
III. And that by their Denying, Excusing and Hiding their Blasphemous Notions and Doctrines they are Self-Condemned.
(And therefore I design that this shall end the Controversie between Them and Me.)

Concluded with a *Post-script*,

Proving the Impossibility of Reconciling *Quakerism* to *Christianity*, from the writings of *Robert Barclay*, the *Quakers* most learned Apologist.

By *Daniel Leeds*.

A Man that is an Heretick, after the first and second Admonition, Reject, knowing that he that is such, is subverted, and sinneth, being Condemned of himself, Tit. 3, 10, 11.

Printed and Sold by *William Bradford* at the Sign of the Bible in *New-York*, 1705.

Daniel Leeds, *Mystry of Fox-Craft* (1705). Leeds refers to Caleb Pusey as the "Bomb-Searcher" and accuses him of being "possessed with a lying spirit."

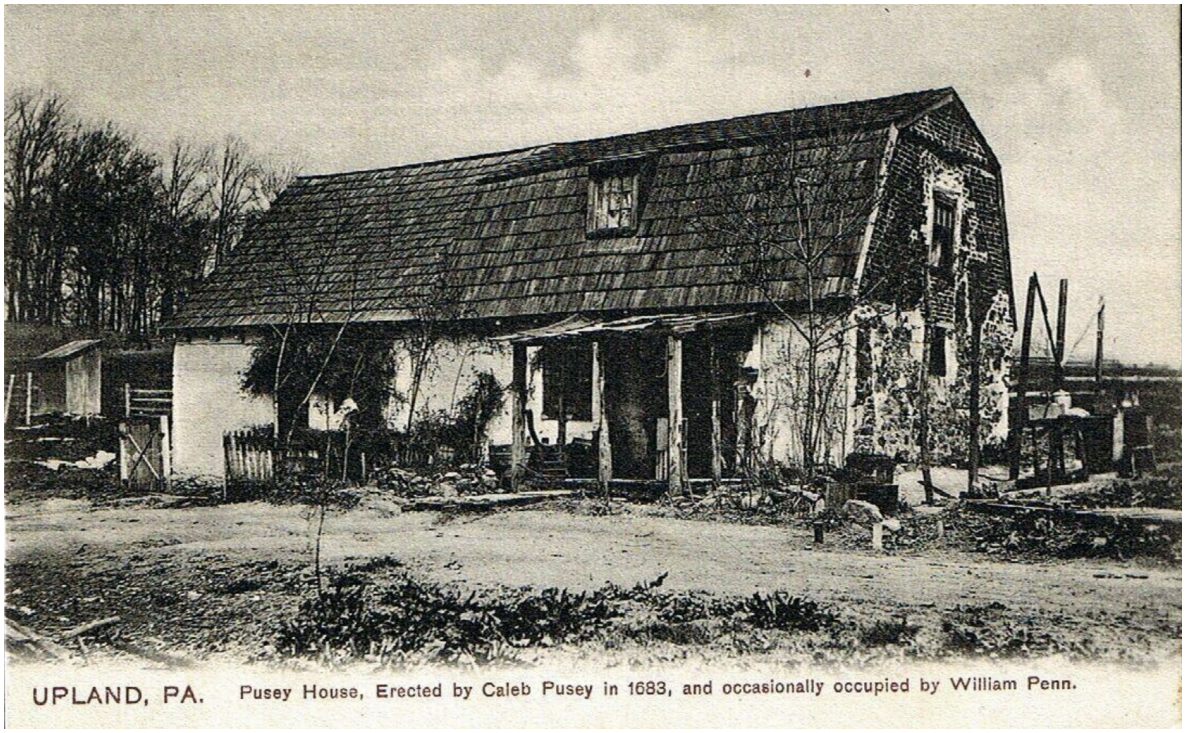
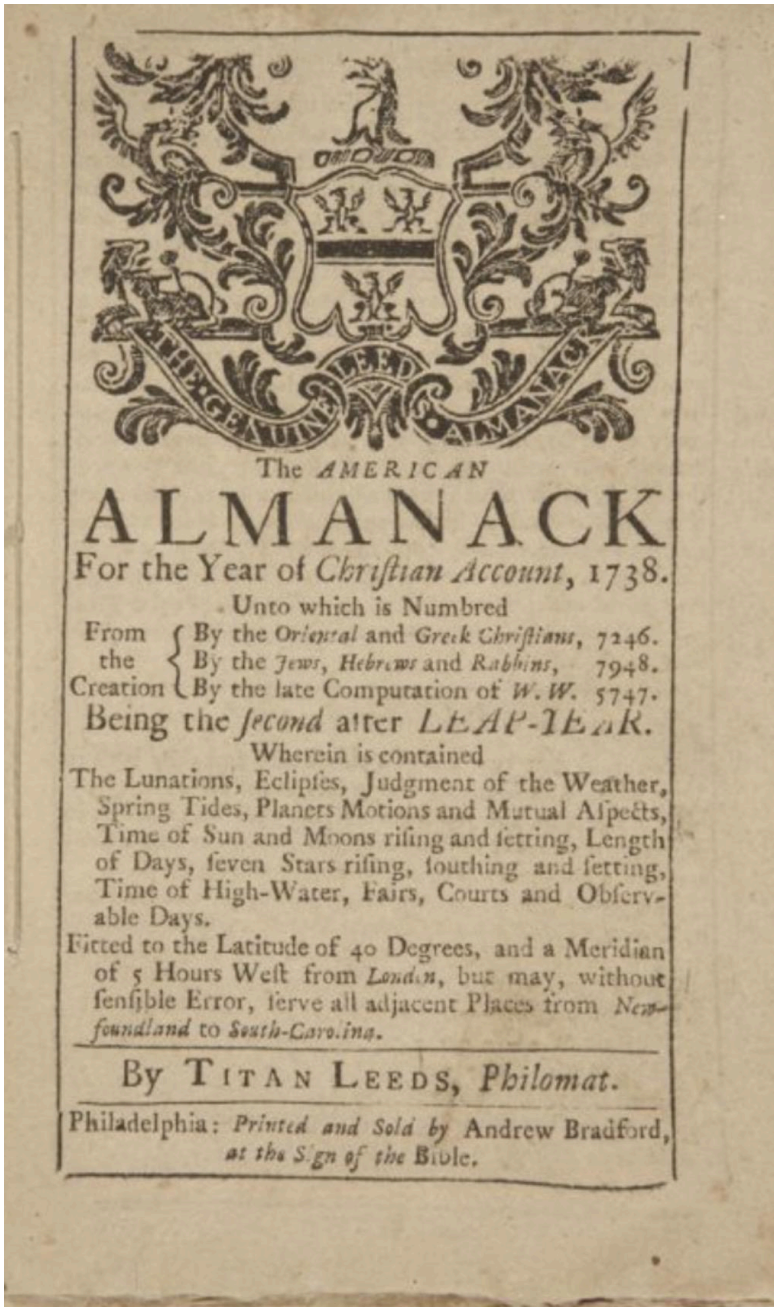


Photo postcard of the Caleb Pusey House, Upland, Delaware County, Pennsylvania.



The *AMERICAN*

ALMANACK

For the Year of *Chriſtian Account*, 1738.

Unto which is Numbred

From the Creation { By the *Oriental* and *Greek Chriſtians*, 7246. / By the *Jews*, *Hebrews* and *Rabbins*, 7948. / By the late Computation of *W. W.* 5747.

Being the *ſecond* after *LEAP-YEAR*.

Wherein is contained

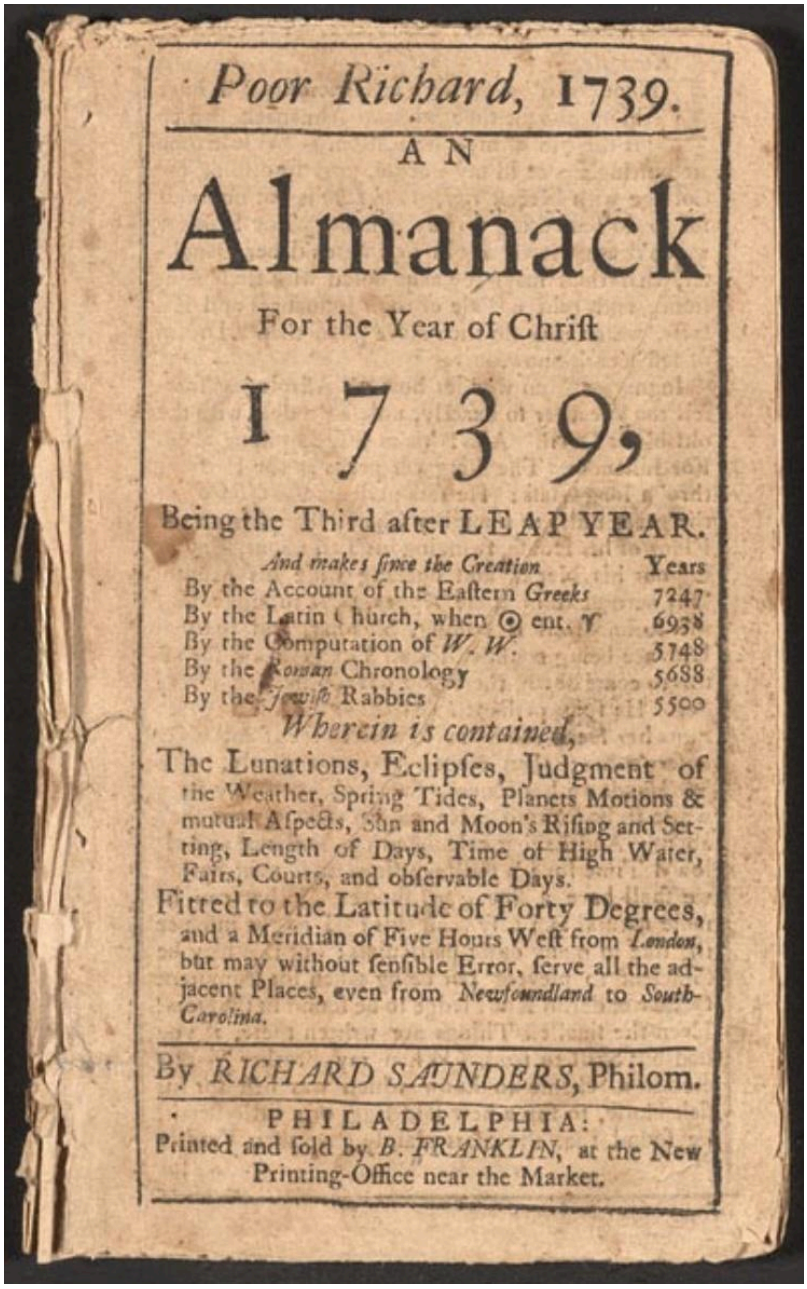
The Lunations, Eclipſes, Judgment of the Weather, Spring Tides, Planets Motions and Mutual Aſpects, Time of Sun and Moons riſing and ſetting, Length of Days, ſeven Stars riſing, ſouthing and ſetting, Time of High-Water, Fairs, Courts and Obſervable Days.

Fitted to the Latitude of 40 Degrees, and a Meridian of 5 Hours Weſt from *London*, but may, without ſenſible Error, ſerve all adjacent Places from *Newfoundland* to *South-Carolina*.

By TITAN LEEDS, *Philomat.*

Philadelphia: *Printed and Sold by* Andrew Bradford, *at the Sign of the* Bible.

1738 image of *American Almanack* by Titan Leeds, son of Daniel Leeds. Take note of the Leeds family coat of arms, which features a wyvern.



Poor Richard, 1739.

AN

Almanack

For the Year of Chriſt

1739,

Being the Third after LEAP YEAR.

And makes ſince the Creation	Years
By the Account of the Eaſtern *Greeks*	7247
By the Latin Church, when ☉ ent. ♈	6938
By the Computation of *W. W.*	5748
By the *Roman* Chronology	5688
By the *Jewiſh* Rabbies	5500

Wherein is contained,

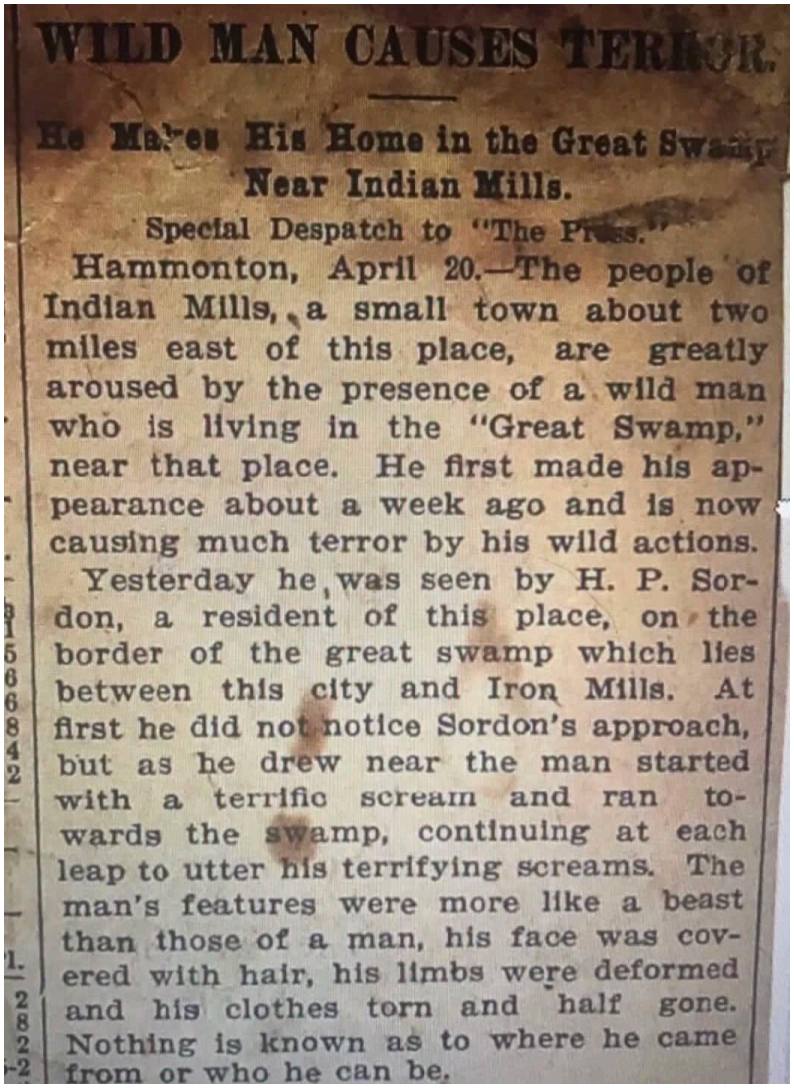
The Lunations, Eclipſes, Judgment of the Weather, Spring Tides, Planets Motions & mutual Aſpects, Sun and Moon's Riſing and Setting, Length of Days, Time of High Water, Fairs, Courts, and obſervable Days.

Fitted to the Latitude of Forty Degrees, and a Meridian of Five Hours Weſt from *London*, but may without ſenſible Error, ſerve all the adjacent Places, even from *Newfoundland* to *South-Carolina*.

By *RICHARD SAUNDERS*, Philom.

PHILADELPHIA:
Printed and ſold by *B. FRANKLIN*, at the New Printing-Office near the Market.

1739 image of Poor Richard's Almanack by Benjamin Franklin.



WILD MAN CAUSES TERROR.

He Makes His Home in the Great Swamp Near Indian Mills.

Special Despatch to "The Press."

Hammonton, April 20.—The people of Indian Mills, a small town about two miles east of this place, are greatly aroused by the presence of a wild man who is living in the "Great Swamp," near that place. He first made his appearance about a week ago and is now causing much terror by his wild actions.

Yesterday he was seen by H. P. Sordon, a resident of this place, on the border of the great swamp which lies between this city and Iron Mills. At first he did not notice Sordon's approach, but as he drew near the man started with a terrific scream and ran towards the swamp, continuing at each leap to utter his terrifying screams. The man's features were more like a beast than those of a man, his face was covered with hair, his limbs were deformed and his clothes torn and half gone. Nothing is known as to where he came from or who he can be.

Unrelated newspaper clipping found by the author tucked inside an old church record book containing entries from the 1800s. The clipping isn't dated, but it appears to describe an incident that took place near Indian Mills and the Great Swamp in Burlington County, New Jersey, with the report filed from nearby Hammonton. The article describes a "wild man" who supposedly lived in the Great Swamp and frightened local residents. According to the account, he screamed, fled into the swamp, had a face "covered with hair," deformed limbs, and tattered clothing. The newspaper even states that nothing was known about where he came from. The witness is identified as H. P. Sordon, who may be Hueling Prickett Sordon (c. 1854–1930), a real resident of the Hammonton area. Was this simply an unfortunate man living in isolation... or the beginning of another Pine Barrens legend?

So, was there ever a real Jersey Devil? History cannot answer that. What it does show is that long before tales of a winged monster, there was already a very real "Leeds Devil" in the public imagination. Through religious controversy, political conflict, family symbolism, and even Benjamin Franklin's sharp wit, the Leeds name became inseparable from the supernatural. The monster may belong to folklore, but the story of how it came to be appears to be firmly rooted in history.

Sources:

1. Daniel Leeds, *Almanack* (1687). Take note of the astrology used.

https://archive.org/details/bim_early-english-books-1641-1700_an-almanack-for-1687_almanacs-leeds-daniel_1687

2. Titan Leeds, *American Almanack* (1738). Titan Leeds was the son of Daniel Leeds. Take note of the Leeds family coat of arms, which features a wyvern.
https://www.williamreesecompany.com/the-american-almanack-for-the-year-of-christian-account-1738-37721.html

3. Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard's Almanack* (1739).

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Poor_Richard_Almanack_1739.jpg

4. Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin and Jonathan Edwards: Selections From Their Writings* (1920). See page XXI under Introduction.
https://archive.org/details/benjaminfranklin0002fran_e3z5/page/n23/mode/2up

5. *Poor Richard's Almanac*, 1735, a transcription:
http://www.vlib.us/amdocs/texts/prichard35.html

6. Daniel Leeds, *The Temple of Wisdom for the Little World* (1688).
https://archive.org/details/bim_early-english-books-1641-1700_the-temple-of-wisdom-for_leeds-daniel_1688/mode/2up

7. Daniel Leeds, *News of a Trumpet Sounding in the Wilderness* (1697) or *A Trumpet Sounded Out of the Wilderness of America* (1699).
https://archive.org/details/newsatrumpetsou00leedgoog/page/n2/mode/2up

8. Willard Heiss, *Quaker Biographical Sketches of Ministers and Elders, and Other Concerned Members of the Yearly Meeting of Philadelphia, 1682–1800* (1972), pp. 104–106. Passage discusses Caleb Pusey and Daniel Leeds in depth.
https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CSZZ-NS3N-S

9. Daniel Leeds, *The Second Part of the Mystry of Fox-Craft* (1705).
https://archive.org/details/mystryfoxcraft00leedrich/page/n1/mode/2up